

# Online Allies? Exploring Black Travelers' Perceptions of DMO Social Advocacy Statements

Journal of Travel Research  
1–18  
© The Author(s) 2024  
Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/00472875241294235  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jtr



Charis Tucker<sup>1</sup>, Nancy G. McGehee<sup>2</sup>, and Kristin Lamoureux<sup>3</sup> **[AQ: I]**

## Abstract

Many U.S. destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have utilized social media to express support for the Black community amidst the Black Lives Matter racial justice movement. Current research lacks insight into ways in which Black travelers judge these efforts known as advocacy statements. This study uses a 2 × 2 experimental design to examine how Black travelers evaluate various forms of statements. Additionally, this work explores the mediating role of relational legitimacy between advocacy statements and behavioral intentions and finds it to be significant. Black travelers in this study find statements containing both an image and text to be the most appropriate form of digital social advocacy. Organizations can leverage these findings to create effective advocacy campaigns that go beyond performative and reflect substantive policies and strategies.

## Keywords

legitimacy, social media, black travel, digital advocacy, racial justice

## Introduction

In the United States, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are primarily non-profit governmental agencies that play a key role in the tourism industry. While historically these organizations have focused on promotion, more recently many have expanded to include development and community engagement (Tucker et al., 2023). Most DMOs regularly use social media to engage in two-way communication with constituents including residents and visitors. This is a valuable way to create an image of the destination for prospective visitors. By engaging with their audience, DMOs can build relationships and gather feedback from social media users (H. Li et al., 2023). Additionally, tourism organizations are increasingly using social media to demonstrate allyship or advocacy for various socio-political issues (Sobande, 2024; Yim, 2021). For example, during the summer of 2020, the deaths of Black Americans, particularly in connection with police, received heightened media coverage. Specifically, the viral video of George Floyd's death marked a significant turning point for many in the United States. Social media played a critical role in highlighting the longstanding issues associated with Black Americans and the justice system, amplifying calls for justice and police reform. In response, businesses, and organizations, including

DMOs, used social media to issue statements of solidarity with the Black community and/or the Black Lives Matter movement, showcasing their advocacy and allyship (Wertley & Baker, 2022).

This virtual form of advocacy was widely recognized as #BlackoutTuesday. Tourism organizations commonly utilized visual stimulants (e.g., photos, videos, artwork, graphics) often accompanied by written statements to communicate their advocacy for racial justice. Some tourism businesses posted a single black square; others posted the square and included a brief statement to demonstrate their public stance on racial injustice and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion. The ability to use visual and textual

<sup>1</sup>Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL, USA

<sup>2</sup>Howard Feiertag Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, VA, USA

<sup>3</sup>MSBA-HTM Program; Collegiate Associate Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Howard Feiertag Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Tech University-Northern Virginia Center, Falls Church, VA, USA

## Corresponding author:

Charis Tucker, Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism, University of Illinois, 235 Huff Hall, 1206 S. 4th St, Champaign, IL 61820, USA.  
Email: cntucker@illinois.edu

elements on platforms like Instagram helped to capture attention and convey solidarity in an immediate way, enhancing the impact of the DMO's advocacy efforts (Wellman, 2022; Wertley & Baker, 2022). While the current trend suggests that consumers are largely supportive of these types of actions (Yim, 2021), they are not completely without critique. In fact, responses to these types of online advocacy initiatives are varied (Im et al., 2023; Yim, 2021).

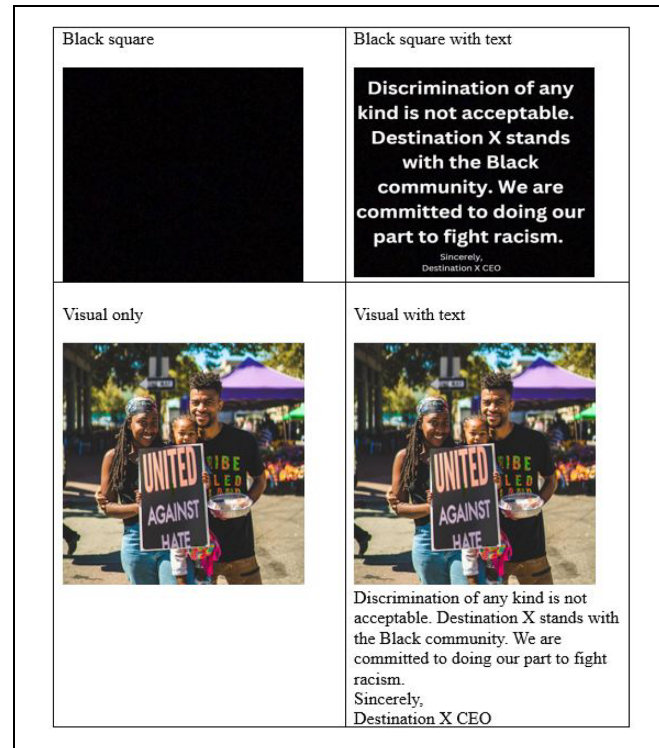
Few studies have examined the intersection of digital advocacy and consumer judgments. Most research has focused on other stakeholders like social media influencers and major corporations. Wellman (2022) interviewed social media influencers to explore the ways in which they were able to effectively merge their everyday content with advocacy related posts. Wertley and Baker (2022) used content analysis to examine Twitter statements made by top U.S. based companies after the death of George Floyd. However, little research to date has been conducted targeting the actual thoughts and opinions of Black American consumers regarding this phenomenon. Using DMOs as context, this study centers the opinions, evaluations, and intentions of Black travelers. Specifically, this work examines how Black American travelers' behavioral intentions are impacted by various types of social advocacy statements initiated by DMOs and whether a specific type of legitimacy known as relational legitimacy mediates this relationship. These statements include both visual and textual cues represented with a singular black square, a black square accompanied with a written statement, a visual alone, or a visual accompanied with a written statement (see Figure 1).

Based on the expert input of DMO representatives, the most recent work on legitimacy theory, and the findings of Tucker et al. (2023) which revealed the importance of the specific dimension of relational legitimacy, the following research questions are posited:

R1: How do Black travelers evaluate DMO racial-justice advocacy statements?

R2: How does relational legitimacy mediate the relationship between racial justice advocacy statements and behavioral intentions?

While these types of advocacy statements were developed and implemented nearly 4 years ago in 2020, we unfortunately continue to witness events that call for this type of support and are likely to see more in the future. Thus, this research provides practical implications for DMOs as they seek to develop policies and strategic plans around future social media responses and connect them with broader destination development initiatives through the theoretical framework of legitimacy theory. As organizations continue to connect with diverse segments of tourists, it will be imperative to have this type of



**Figure 1.** Advocacy statements: black square, black square with statement, visual image, and visual image with statement. [AQ: 2].

framework which addresses the gaps between the industry and historically marginalized groups (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

## Literature Review

### *Destinations, Social Media, and Social Advocacy*

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for social advocacy. It enables organizations and individuals to share their support for social issues and encourage societal change (M. D. Dodd & Supa, 2015; Yim, 2021). In 2020, during the racial awakening in the US, a wide range of private, public, and governmental organizations used their social media platforms to post advocacy statements for Blackout Tuesday (A. Dillette et al., 2024). This collective action sparked worldwide conversations across many industries about representation, inclusion, and racial injustice (Wellman, 2022).

In tourism, some of the primary entities that engaged in these efforts were DMOs. In the United States, a DMO has the responsibility to market the tourism assets of an entire community and is tasked with representing a broad range of stakeholders. It plays a crucial role in shaping the destination's image in the minds of potential visitors (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Tucker et al., 2023). The use of social media to communicate an organization's

stance on social issues can act as a powerful legitimacy strategy, particularly for those substantively engaged in social advocacy, they can also be controversial (Yim, 2021). As it relates to the efforts of DMOs, some constituents were pleased with the racial justice statements, while others viewed them as performative (A. Dillette et al., 2024). Given the complexity of communities, tourists, and social issues, this is not surprising. Organizations that intend to participate in these efforts must consider how their actions may please some but alienate others depending on how they are developed and communicated (Ellerup Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018; Yim, 2021).

### *The Role of Race in Tourism*

Tourism engages a diverse range of people from various demographic backgrounds. However, the topic of race is a relatively silent feature of tourism research (A. Dillette et al., 2024). It is essential to examine the deeper historical context of race and tourism to understand the complexities surrounding social advocacy, particularly as it relates to racial justice (Dudley et al., 2022). In the context of Black travel in the United States, it is a necessary component of understanding the ways in which Black travelers experience and engage with the sector (Benjamin et al., 2024; A. Dillette et al., 2024).

Historically, travel for Black Americans was shaped by a long-standing pattern of segregation and discrimination (S. Park et al., 2022; Sorin, 2020). The period known as Jim Crow resulted in legislation mandating the separation of people by race in public spaces. These legislative restrictions and resulting social norms made it difficult for Black travelers to find safe accommodations and reliable tourism-related services (e.g., hotels, restaurants, gas stations; Alderman et al., 2022). Black travelers navigated these racially hostile environments with resources such as the Green Book. Black owned tourism-related businesses were also developed which helped Black travelers navigate segregated spaces (Bay, 2021; Sorin, 2020).

Advocacy and activism took center stage as Black travelers sought to challenge and transform tourism and society. Grassroots organizing and community mobilization led to effective legislative change (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964), but the social norms associated with life during Jim Crow persisted, continuing the difficulties for Black American travelers (Alderman et al., 2022; A. Dillette et al., 2024). These enduring issues have prompted Black travelers to seek new ways to share their positive travel experiences as well as their concerns and challenges (A. K. Dillette et al., 2019).

Social media has been used as a tool to highlight the Black travel experience. For example, an exploration of tweets shared by Black travelers revealed that while traveling, they frequently carry the weight of the historical implications of race (A. K. Dillette et al., 2019). Their

heightened vigilance ensures the careful destinations choice ensuring they feel safe and welcomed (Tucker et al., 2023). Despite these concerns, Black travelers continue to pursue meaningful travel experiences while also seeking greater inclusion within the sector (Benjamin et al., 2024; A. K. Dillette et al., 2019; A. Dillette & Benjamin, 2022).

The limited (but growing) research on Black travelers underscores the unique challenges and considerations they must navigate, but it also highlights a significant gap within tourism: a lack of representation of Black travelers and their experiences across the industry (A. Dillette et al., 2024). Despite the growing diversity of travelers, the industry has been slow to reflect this change in its development initiatives, marketing, staffing, and overall representation (Davis, 2018; Tucker et al., 2023). Diversity travel consultant Martinique Lewis deftly illuminates these issues through her unique rating system which addresses issues of diversity and inclusion. With low marks in areas such as labor and marketing, Lewis argues that broader representation is needed at all levels to ensure the industry is reflective of the diverse communities it serves (Lewis, 2022). Thus, when tourism organizations began posting their support for the Black community, it is understandable that these advocacy statements were viewed through a critical lens. As Dawkins (2024) states, consumers take on a more critical point of view when an organization's actions are inconsistent. The acute awareness Black travelers have of their racial identity fosters an appreciation for these attempts (A. K. Dillette et al., 2019), but the history of exclusion also breeds skepticism about performative actions that rarely result in substantial change. This underscores the importance of genuine advocacy, not just as a one-time form of engagement, but through a sustained and concerted effort to understand and engage this growing travel segment (A. Dillette et al., 2024).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Legitimacy Theory*

Legitimacy theory is based on an organization's ability to be seen as a viable part of society (Tost, 2011) and is defined as "the generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). According to the originators, organizations use a variety of practices, including strategic communication methods, to demonstrate their value to society. Individuals, in turn, use pre-existing standards to make judgments on these actions based on their values and expectations (Vaara et al., 2024). As Randrianasolo and Arnold (2020) state, it is important to understand "how consumers grant

legitimacy or social acceptance to organizations” (p. 385) through thoughtfully developed scales.

Commonly cited and supported dimensions of legitimacy theory are pragmatic, moral, cognitive, and relational (Deephouse et al., 2017). Pragmatic legitimacy is used to measure the communication between an organization and its stakeholders. Consumers grant pragmatic legitimacy based on how well an organization meets an individual’s needs. For example, Tucker et al. (2023) found that Black travelers based pragmatic legitimacy on a DMO’s ability to develop valuable activities, understand their needs, and employ skilled staff. Moral legitimacy focuses on the connection between organizational actions and stakeholders’ values (Ellerup Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). Specifically, an individual’s judgments are based on their degree of ethical certainty, which impacts their evaluation of moral legitimacy (Tost, 2011). Cognitive legitimacy speaks to an organization’s engagement in activities that are considered mainstream by business standards and societal norms. For example, Black travelers agree that DMOs and their activities are a relevant part of the tourism industry (Tucker et al., 2023). Relational legitimacy focuses on an organization’s ability to affirm one’s social identity. Black travelers evaluate relational legitimacy based on how well an organization recognizes and values aspects of their culture (Tost, 2011).

Each of these forms of legitimacy is well-documented and developed, but relational legitimacy is the newest concept and is somewhat under-studied. Extant studies in this area have placed relational legitimacy at the forefront of identity-related research (Treviño et al., 2014; Tyler, 1997). Exploring the intersecting role of race and legitimacy can be difficult given the highly nuanced nature of both concepts. Historical and temporal contexts as well as other identity-related factors may impact consumer judgments. While including all elements associated with various external factors is out of the scope of this study, the researchers intend to build a foundation that focuses on relational legitimacy as a means of exploring racial justice advocacy by DMOs.

### **Relational Legitimacy**

Relational legitimacy considers how people judge organizations based on identity, particularly regarding their group membership. In other words, individuals make judgments based on treatment related to their social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tyler, 1997). The more people identify with their group membership, the more likely their judgments will be based on relational attributes (Palmer et al., 2013).

Much of what is known about relational legitimacy centers around the interactions between authorities and subordinates. People rely on relational information more than any other dimension to explain their willingness to

obey rules (Tyler, 1997; Tyler & Lind, 1992). In such situations, power dynamics are important as individuals also base their actions on perceived levels of integrity and care as experienced by authorities (Tost, 2011). Tyler (1997) has suggested organizations seeking to communicate identity-relevant information should consider their role as neutral agents in the situation, the level of trustworthiness associated with their actions, and recognition of the group’s status (Tyler, 1997).

The early exploration of relational legitimacy described above focused on the relationship between individuals within an organization, thereby omitting the perspectives and judgment processes of unaffiliated members such as consumers (Drori & Honig, 2013; Huy et al., 2014; Treviño et al., 2014). A resurgence in individuals judgments led Tost (2011) to formulate a three-stage integrated model to demonstrate how individuals make legitimacy judgments and how they may change over time.

The model includes stages of judgment formation, judgment use, and judgment reassessment. First, an individual forms a judgment about an organization or its actions. Tost (2011) found that most judgments are made quickly (i.e., passively) and tend to occur when an individual feels an organization’s actions have met their expectations. However, in certain situations, individuals take a more evaluative approach, seeking additional information before making a judgment. As previous literature suggested, people will form affirmative relational judgments on organizations whose actions are personally relevant. Subsequently, relational legitimacy informs the extent to which consumers want to form partnerships with an organization (X. Chen et al., 2021; Tost, 2011).

Judgments established during the formation stage are generally continued into the use stage, whereby people will enact specific behaviors based on legitimacy. Entities viewed as legitimate are supported, while those marked as illegitimate may be scrutinized. However, there are situations (e.g., Blackout Tuesday) that cause individuals to re-evaluate their initial judgments. This phase, known as the reassessment stage, is when individuals push for change (Tost, 2011). The conceptual focus on legitimacy is particularly useful in understanding its connections to identity related judgments, however, it does not offer operational information to further examine relational legitimacy in specific contexts (e.g., advocacy). Very little work has been conducted regarding relational legitimacy and tourism. To date, the only work known is Tucker et al.’s (2023) study.

This current study seeks to continue the work of race, advocacy, and legitimacy by exploring how Black travelers evaluate racial justice advocacy statements and how subsequent behavioral intentions are impacted. While the work is quantitative, the authors still feel a statement of positionality is important. As a Black female who has

traveled extensively and lived abroad, served as an advisor on a regional DMO, and has studied the history of Black travel in the U.S., Dr. Tucker's work centers the experiences of Black travelers and seeks to emphasize inclusive tourism practices. Dr. McGehee is a white female sociologist originally from the Appalachian region of the U.S., with 30 years' experience as a researcher, primarily in the areas of social movements and rural tourism development. Dr. Lamoureux is a white female professor, primarily focused on sustainable tourism, indigenous tourism development and inclusivity. Having spent a significant portion of her formative years in Latin America, her work is influenced by understanding both the value and challenges of tourism on communities. All three authors are careful to acknowledge the ways in which their lived experiences inform their research.

## Research Hypotheses

### *Issue Legitimacy*

Issue legitimacy is defined as the public's perception that an issue is proper or appropriate for a certain type of organization to engage (Chung et al., 2016). Arguably, it is important to first establish whether the sample population views participation in issues of race as appropriate before measuring their success in engaging in such issues. Both general organizational engagement and specific engagement by DMOs were measured to benchmark participants' opinions on whether organizations should be engaged in race-related social advocacy at all.

**H1.** Black travelers support for engagement in race-related social advocacy will be consistent whether initiated by organizations in general or by DMOs.

### *View of Advocacy Statements as an Appropriate Response*

Organizations have used social media platforms to post advocacy statements, including variations of visual and textual messages, to publicly convey their stance on racial justice. In line with Yim (2021), this study posits that different racial justice statements will evoke varying levels of approval, with posts consisting of visual and text receiving higher appropriateness scores.

Existing research on advocacy statements, while limited, suggests that the content of such messages should include three components: the specific issue, an expression of solidarity, and a commitment to action (Wertley & Baker, 2022). Similarly, the inclusion of concrete language (K. Park & Jiang, 2023), messages from CEOs (Brenstad & Søltnes, 2019), and action steps (Heffron, 2019) were also found to have a positive impact on consumers

judgments of the statements and/or the company itself. These findings offer useful suggestions for crafting text-based messages but are less insightful when considering the type of imagery that should be used when advocating for a topic via social media.

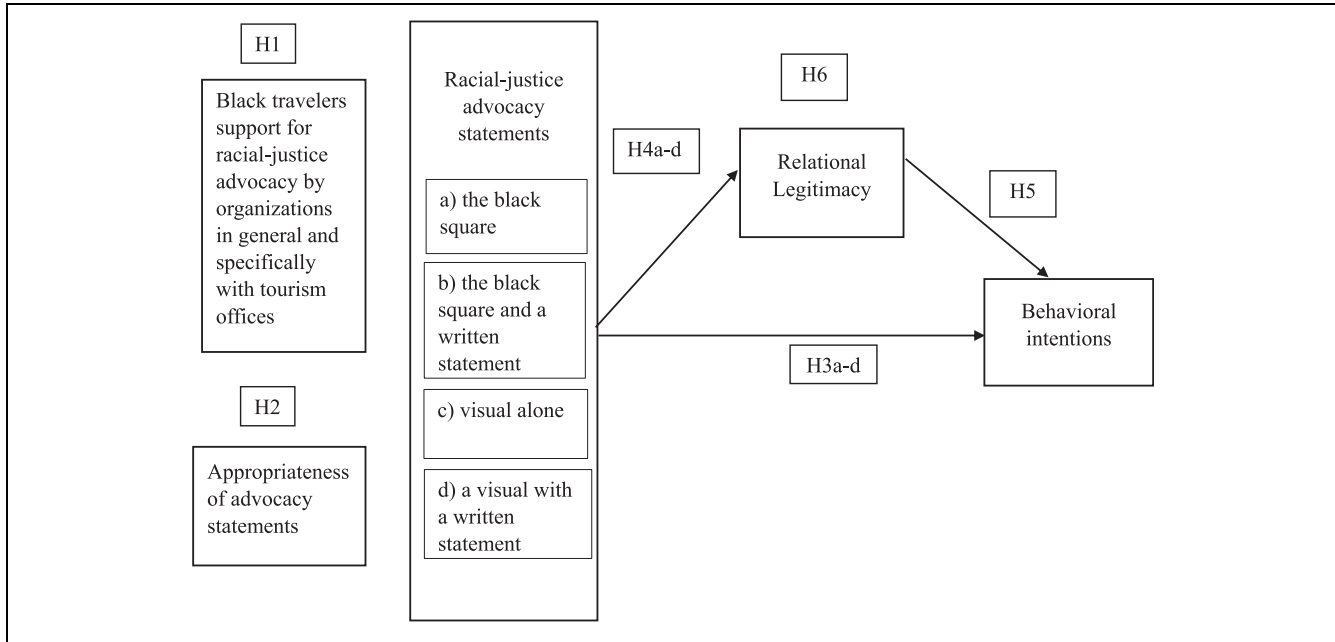
There is a great deal of research focused on the use of photos and image perceptions in general in social media (Y. Chen et al., 2023; Y. Li & Xie, 2020; Ma & Fan, 2022). Not surprisingly, scholars have found photos to be the top form of visual representation used to influence how tourists think about a destination (H. Li et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2020). By integrating existing knowledge of best practices for social advocacy and the importance of photos, the visual and written statement combined is likely to be viewed as a more appropriate response.

**H2.** Advocacy statements with a visual and written component will be perceived by Black travelers as a more appropriate response to racial justice advocacy over statements with only the black square, a black square and written statement, and a visual alone.

### *Advocacy Statements and Behavioral Intentions*

Organizational engagement in social advocacy has increased across many types of businesses. Topics such as racial discrimination and gender equality have been points of discussion for various organizations, including tourism (Farmaki, 2022; Yim, 2021). Organizational participation in social advocacy can generate a wide range of socially and financially rewarding consumer responses (Tyler & Lind, 1992; Yim, 2021). For example, when advocacy statements are evaluated positively, they have been found to influence the opinions and actions of consumers, thereby increasing both word-of-mouth support and intention to purchase (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Korschun et al., 2019). M. D. Dodd and Supa (2015) investigated social advocacy involvement on the topic of same-sex marriage and found that social advocacy had a significant impact on purchase intentions. Not surprisingly, they found that intention to purchase was highest when the organization's beliefs and the individual's beliefs aligned. Organizations that engage in this work must recognize the potential for both positive and negative outcomes (Yim, 2021), but in balance, advocacy has been positively impactful for businesses.

The use of advocacy statements as a predictor of behavioral intentions in general (M. Dodd, 2018; M. D. Dodd & Supa, 2015) as well as specific to tourism, is sorely understudied (Gretzel, 2017). This is puzzling given that understanding tourist behavior has been a prominent focus of tourism research for decades (Dolnicar et al., 2015; Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020). Current research on tourist behavior intentions has largely focused on the powerful



**Figure 2.** The research model and hypotheses.

influence of various forms of social media (Bui et al., 2022; Y. Chen et al., 2023). Both user-generated content by social media influencers (Bastrygina et al., 2024; Pop et al., 2022) and destination content generated by digital marketers working for destination management organizations (Lee et al., 2021) have been found to be influential toward tourist behavior intention. Combinations of visual and written narratives in different forms of social media targeting different groups of potential travelers have also been examined in search of ideal posts that best result in intention to visit (H. Li et al., 2023). No work was found that examines the connection between advocacy statements and tourist behavior intentions.

Following the findings from current research that emphasizes the need for an organization's advocacy statements to align with consumer beliefs, coupled with the influence of social media on tourist behavior intention, we posit that the engagement of DMOs in racial justice advocacy will influence the behavioral intentions of Black travelers, but it may be influenced by the types of statements used (Figure 2). For this study, the measure of behavioral intentions was based on the work of Dolnicar et al. (2015) who analyzed survey items used to operationalize this dependent variable and made recommendations as to best practices.

**H3.** The presence of racial justice advocacy statements will influence Black travelers' behavioral intentions.

**H3a.** Of all the advocacy statements, the one consisting of only the black square will result in the lowest rates of behavioral intentions.

**H3b.** The black square containing a written statement will exhibit higher rates of behavioral intentions compared to participants exposed to the black square.

**H3c.** The visual with no written statement will exhibit higher rates of behavioral intentions compared to participants exposed to the black square and the black square with a written statement.

**H3d.** The visual advocacy statement with a written statement will exhibit the highest rate of behavioral intentions compared to the black square, the black square with a written statement, and a visual with no written statement.

### *Advocacy Statements and Relational Legitimacy*

Relational legitimacy considers how well an organization, and its actions affirm an individual's social identity (Tost, 2011). In an endeavor to better understand how individuals make judgments based on the social identity of race, Tucker et al. (2023) developed the Black Traveler Destination Marketing Organization Legitimacy Scale that included several types of legitimacy, including specific items associated with relational legitimacy. The findings from this study revealed the importance of relational legitimacy, that is, being recognized, valued, and seen in tourism products and services. We argue that this is likely to extend to elements of digital advocacy. Thus, relational legitimacy-specific items from this scale are used to understand how Black travelers assess the relational legitimacy of social advocacy statements.

**H4.** There is a difference in Black travelers' perception of relational legitimacy across types of racial justice advocacy statements.

H4a. Of all the advocacy statements, the black square will exhibit the lowest rate of perceived relational legitimacy.

H4b. The black square with a written statement will exhibit higher rates of perceived relational legitimacy compared to the black square.

H4c. The visual alone will exhibit higher rates of perceived relational legitimacy compared to the black square and the black square with a written statement.

H4d. The visual with a written statement will exhibit the highest rate of relational legitimacy compared to the black square, the black square with a written statement, and the visual alone.

### **Relational Legitimacy of Racial Justice Advocacy Statements and Behavioral Intentions**

Based on previously discussed research on advocacy, relational legitimacy, and behavioral intentions, we posit that Black travelers will be drawn to statements whose actions they perceive as affirming their identity, thereby enhancing behaviors such as sharing positive reviews, recommendations, and intention to visit.

**H5.** The perceived relational legitimacy of DMOs' racial justice advocacy statements will influence Black travelers' behavioral intentions such that the visual with the written statement will be stronger than the black square, the black square with text, and the visual alone.

**H6.** Perceived relational legitimacy will mediate the relationship between racial justice advocacy statements and Black travelers' behavioral intentions.

### **Experimental Research and Survey Instrument Design**

This study used a  $2 \times 2$  within-subjects experimental design to examine preferences for the visual and textual aspects of social advocacy statements by Black travelers. As with any study, precautions must be made to minimize common method bias in the survey design (Podsakoff et al., 2012), including the minimization of ambiguous language and attention checks. To minimize ambiguous language, a pilot and pretest were implemented to ensure each phase of the survey included clear and concise directions, clarifying statements for industry specific terms (e.g., destination marketing organizations), and mutually exclusive scale items (DeVellis, 2016; Podsakoff et al., 2012). The survey instrument was also reviewed by three

tourism professors and one marketing professor who specializes in experimental design.

Attention checks were also embedded in the survey. Meade and Craig (2012) recommend up to three directed response items for every 50 to 100 items. Based on this metric, our study had two directed response items. The first attention check: *Please select "strongly agree" from the list below* was placed after the introductory material to ensure participants were attentive at the beginning of the study. The second attention check: *Please select the number 24 from the list below* was included after the series of advocacy statements.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the R software program version 4.3.2. A power analysis using G\*power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007) using an effect size of 0.25, alpha = 0.05, and power = 0.90 recommended a sample size of 160 participants. To account for sampling concerns, 196 participants were recruited from Prolific with one participant excluded for failure to pass the attention check. This resulted in a total of 195 participants.

Prolific was selected over other platforms (like MTurk) because it allows the researcher to more accurately identify demographic features like race during the pre-screening process, which was crucial as it was imperative we have confidence that the participants taking the survey identified as Black/African American. Similarly to other crowdsourcing platforms, participants self-reported demographic information. However, the prescreening feature enabled researchers to select the desired demographics of participants. Only those who match these descriptions were sent the survey information. Comparatively, platforms like MTurk do not have a racial prescreening feature.

Customary with experimental design studies, participants were given an introduction page that described the purpose of the study and offered instructions for how to proceed. They were also provided with a brief description of DMOs in which the overall functions were described. The term tourism office was used to provide participants with an easier way to conceptualize DMOs. Next, participants were asked to read a brief statement (Figure 3) describing Blackout Tuesday which catalyzed the posting of social advocacy statements. This statement was included to provide participants with the context of the study.

Participants were then asked how they felt about both organizations in general and DMOs specifically engaging in online advocacy related to race. Five items were included to more deeply understand participants' feelings about online advocacy using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): *Organizations in general should create and post advocacy statements; I have a positive opinion about the advocacy statements organizations use in support of racial justice; Advocacy statements posted by organizations have helped people learn*

### Description of Online Activism

After extensive media coverage of the deaths of Black Americans, there was a rapid growth of collective public action both in-person and online. One major online action involved organizations and individuals posting black squares on their social media page. The events became known as Blackout Tuesday. The black squares were meant to symbolize an organization's support for the Black community and/or the Black Lives Matter movement. While many organizations posted only black squares, others posted black squares with statements of advocacy, or other visuals with or without written statements. Many tourism offices engaged in this form of online advocacy.

**Figure 3.** Description of online activism.

*about racial justice; I think that any problem associated with the creation of organizations' advocacy statements in support of racial justice could be solved; Overall, the benefits of organizations' advocacy statements for racial justice outweigh problems.* The same questions were posed for tourism offices, with this as the lead question: *How do you feel about tourism offices posting online advocacy statements?* Finally, participants were given the opportunity to provide a response to the open-ended statement: *Can you tell us more about your feelings about organizations creating and posting advocacy statements like those described in the statement above?*

Next, participants were shown four different advocacy statements (see Figure 1). The advocacy statements were adapted from actual DMO posts. The first advocacy statement, an image of a plain black square, was the original digital advocacy call to action and was utilized by many DMOs. The second statement, a black square with text emphasizing the DMO's stance on racism and support for the Black community, used language edited from an original DMO post. The third and fourth images feature a young heterosexual Black family in a park-like setting; one with and one without the supporting text used in the second statement. To avoid location bias, the names of the DMOs were removed and are referred to as Destination X.

Due to the within-subjects design, Qualtrics's randomizer feature was critical to ensuring reliability and validity of the experimental findings. The randomizer uses a form of counterbalancing by which all selected elements are evenly presented, minimizing order effects. Because all participants were exposed to each of the conditions, this feature ensured the effects were distributed evenly and in varying order. Thus, each statement was presented in a different order an equal number of times. The process helps to minimize potential bias (Qualtrics, 2024).

Following each advocacy statement, participants answered questions about relational legitimacy and behavioral intentions using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The four behavioral intention items were based on Dolnicar et al. (2015). They

*included: I would recommend this destination to my family and friends; I would make positive comments about this destination; I would speak highly of the destination to family and friends; I would plan to visit this destination.* After each set of relational legitimacy and behavioral intention questions, participants were given the opportunity to respond to the open-ended question: *If you saw this form of advocacy statement as part of your information search for comparing destinations to visit, how would it influence your opinion of the destination?* Once all statements were viewed, participants were asked to rank the advocacy statements in order of their appropriateness. This item was used as a manipulation check to ensure that participants perceived the advocacy statements as intended by the researchers.

While this is a quantitative study, participants were also given two opportunities to share open-ended statements allowing them to elaborate on their opinions in ways that might not be captured by the survey questions. The inclusion of open-ended questions provides context for consumer thoughts and opinions regarding the different types of advocacy statements (Hadler, 2023; Li, 2023 [AQ: 3]). The researchers believed it was important to include open-ended opportunities given the relatively under-studied area of advocacy statements; as scholar-activists, they also felt that participants would welcome the opportunity to share more about their experiences. Indeed, all participants provided responses to each of the open-ended questions, offering valuable insights on each advocacy statement. At the end of the survey, participants had a second opportunity to share additional thoughts about the types and/or uses of advocacy statements posted by tourism offices. Data from the open-ended questions were not formally analyzed for this study; they were, however, used to illustrate and add richness to the quantitative findings.

## Results and Discussion

### Participant Profile

The sample included 195 participants, all of whom identified as Black or African American. Participants were

evenly distributed between 25 and 34 (24%), 35 to 44 (23%), and 45 to 54 (25%), with fewer older responses (55–64 at 13% and 65–74 at 3%). Slightly over half the participants were male (51%,  $n = 99$ ) and 49% were female ( $n = 95$ ). One participant identified as non-binary. All participants had at least a high school diploma, with 39% possessing a bachelor's degree and 16% with a graduate degree. In terms of familiarity and use of DMOs, 44.1% reported using a DMO to plan a previous vacation, 48.7% had not used a DMO, and 7.2% were unsure about their use of DMOs. Slightly over three-quarters (75.9%) had taken a vacation within 12 months of the data collection period. While each of these items had the potential to be confounding variables, regression analysis based on age, DMO use and familiarity, and the timing of the last trip revealed that none of the variables had a significant impact on relational legitimacy or behavioral intentions.

### Issue Legitimacy

*H1. Black travelers' support for engagement in race-related social advocacy will be consistent whether initiated by organizations in general or by DMOs.*

Issue legitimacy was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The overall mean scores between organizations in general are ( $M = 5.01$ ) and tourism offices ( $M = 5.02$ ). Repeated measures ANOVA indicated there is not a significant effect,  $F(1, 194) = 0.03$ ,  $p = .87$ , between expectations for organizations in general and tourism offices specifically, thus H1 is supported. These findings suggest that regardless of organization type, Black travelers support organizational engagement in race-related social advocacy.

Responses to the open-ended questions expound on Black travelers' thoughts regarding an organization's use of racial justice advocacy statements:

*"It creates awareness, especially for people of different race[s]."*

*"I believe that tourism offices should be able to create and post advocacy statements.*

*Advocacy statements can be a powerful way for tourism offices to express their values and beliefs, and to promote positive social change."*

*"I think when advocacy statements are made, they go a long way to make those affected feel seen and recognized."*

These excerpts represent the multi-level impact of social advocacy. The first two quotes are indicators of the role of advocacy statements in making others aware of a specific situation, particularly for those who may not be

directly impacted. The second statement underscores the use of advocacy statements to increase awareness and how they can be used as a tool to encourage change (Yim, 2021). The third statement highlights the relational benefits association of social advocacy. At the individual level, such actions are viewed as appropriate because they acknowledge the specific situation, thereby validating the experiences and feelings of those impacted by the issue (Tucker et al., 2023).

### Advocacy Statements as an Appropriate Response

*H2. Advocacy statements with a visual and written component will be perceived by Black travelers as a more appropriate response to racial justice advocacy over statements with only the black square, the black square and written statement, and the visual alone.*

Participants were asked to rank each advocacy statement for levels of appropriateness, 1 representing the most appropriate and 4 as the least. Descriptive results indicate that the statement with a visual and written statement was perceived as the most appropriate ( $n = 111$ ) and the black square was ranked as the least appropriate ( $n = 22$ ). To further explore these results, ANOVA was conducted. Results indicate significant differences across the appropriateness of statements,  $F(3, 582) = 75$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons using paired t-tests revealed that the black square was significantly different ( $p < .001$ ) from both the visual with the written statement and the black square with the written statement (Table 1). To elaborate, when considering the black square, one participant stated:

*"If they want to make an advocacy statement, I would like them to put actual effort and thought as to what they would like to post. A black shape with nothing else on it is disrespectful to the Black community."*

The quantitative results coupled with the statement suggests that even with knowledge of the call to action, the intention of the black square alone did not resonate with Black travelers. Conversely, the statement with the visual and the written statement was viewed more favorably than the others, with one participant stating: "I think an advocacy statement containing a visual statement and a caption show real support for a community." In this sense, the hypothesis was largely supported.

While the advocacy statement with the visual and written component was viewed as most appropriate, the differences between the remaining items were interesting. There was not a significant difference between the visual alone and the black square with the written statement

**Table 1.** Pairwise Comparison *t*-Test (*p*-Values): Appropriateness.

Variable	Visual w/ written statement	Visual	Black square w/ written statement
Visual	0.001		
Black square with statement	0.001	0.06	
Black square	0.001	0.001	0.00

$p < .001$ .

( $p = .6$ ). Further analysis to explore this lack of difference, which was conducted using the Holm method to adjust *p*-values, suggests that there was an overall effect across all four manipulations (as indicated in the ANOVA), but again the difference between the black square with text and the visual alone was limited. The similarity of appropriateness between the black square with the text and the visual statement is likely due to a combination of a lack of specificity with the black square and/or contextual clarity with the photo. Both represent a “middle ground” that provides some information and support but not as much as the visual and written statement together. The black square with the text lacked the visual representation needed to connect with Black travelers, leaving many to question “where is the action behind the words.”

In addition to using the ranking to test the hypothesis, it was also used as a manipulation check. The ANOVA results, along with numerous open-ended quotes differentiating the various advocacy statements, confirmed that participants perceived the differences intended by the experimental design.

### Advocacy Statements and Behavioral Intentions

**H3.** *The presence of racial justice advocacy statements will influence Black travelers' behavioral intentions.*

A comparative approach was used to assess the varying visual and textual elements on behavioral intentions. This involved examining the effectiveness of each of the four advocacy statements (H3a-d). To test this hypothesis, ANOVA was conducted. The results indicate that advocacy statements have a significant different impact on behavior,  $F(3, 776) = 32.7, p < .001$ . Recognizing that at least one of the statements was significantly different, further analysis was conducted. First, the estimated marginal means (EMMeans) were calculated revealing the following results: the black square = 4.20, 95% [CI] [4.00 4.40]; black square with text = 5.19, 95% [CI] [4.99 5.39]; visual alone = 5.32, 95% [CI] [5.12 5.53]; and the visual with the text = 5.51, 95% [CI] [5.31 5.72]. Tukey's post

hoc test was conducted, revealing that there was a significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) in the black square's influence on behavior, resulting in lower levels of positive recommendations and likelihood of visitation. Comparisons for the remaining statements did not yield a statistical difference in behavior. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was partially supported in that all forms of advocacy have some influence, but the type of statement matters greatly.

Comments from participants further support these findings. For example, in reference to the black square, one participant stated, “It would influence my opinion of the destination in a bad way” while another stated, “I would not associate with them.” Conversely, the black square with text, visual alone, and visual with text were viewed more positively. Illustrative statements support these findings:

*Destination X has clearly proven to me that, they do not condone any sort of discrimination. I would go to a place like this.*

*I think what they are showing is a good thing and I would be ok going there.*

*It will influence my opinions positively and I [would] like to visit the location. I will feel like I belong to this place.*

These statements underscore the importance of understanding how various aspects of racial justice advocacy statements influence behavior. This information further suggests how DMOs can shape their statements to reach specific populations.

It should be noted that the variable personal attitude toward social advocacy, captured in their responses to whether they felt organizations in general and tourism offices specifically should participate in social advocacy, has the potential to be confounding for these hypotheses. Regression analysis using R revealed no significant impact on behavioral intentions. Due to a lack of impact on the model, this variable was excluded to preserve parsimony.

### Advocacy Statements and Relational Legitimacy

**H4.** *There is a difference in Black travelers' perception of relational legitimacy across types of racial justice advocacy statements.*

Each of the various statistical analyses revealed strong support for Hypotheses 4a-d. Mean scores for each statement reveal increasing rates of relational legitimacy: black square = 4.18, black square with text = 5.37, visual alone = 5.52, visual with text = 5.71. To test differences between statements, repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. A highly significant effect was found,  $F(3, 582) = 110, p < .001$ , which indicates strong variability between statements. Thus, a pairwise *t*-test was used to determine differences in relational legitimacy among all

**Table 2.** Pairwise Comparison *t*-Test (*p*-Values): Relational Legitimacy of Racial Justice Advocacy Statements.

Variable	Black square	Black square w/ written statement	Visual alone
Black square w/ written statement	0.001		
Visual alone	0.001	0.04	
Visual w/ written statement	0.001	0.001	0.003

$p < .001$ .

four statements. Results indicate each advocacy statement is statistically significant (Table 2), supporting the hypothesis. Specifically, comparisons between the black square, the black square with text, and the visual alone resulted in  $p < .0001$  indicating high significant differences. Comparisons between the black square with text and the visual alone, the  $p$ -value = .04. Comparisons between the black square to the visual with text yielded a  $p$ -value  $< .0001$ . The black square with text and the visual with text resulted in a  $p$ -value of .00001, and the visual alone and the visual with text resulted in a  $p$ -value of .003.

The open-ended statements were used to illustrate the differences in relational legitimacy among each statement. Responses to the black square suggest low levels of relational legitimacy. For example, one participant stated:

*"I think this is a little lackluster compared to the other statements I have seen. I don't want to be represented by just a black square."*

While some "appreciated the gesture," the black square failed to connect with most participants on a deeper level, as was the case with this participant who stated:

*"I would think that the people at the destination just want to follow the latest trend and actually don't care about issues pertaining to the situation of minorities in America."*

The black square demonstrates the destination's willingness to engage but is not strong enough to connect with Black travelers on matters associated with race and racial justice.

The black square with the written statement gained slightly more relational legitimacy, but interestingly, this form of advocacy evoked questions about the organization's level of understanding for the Black experience and their actions beyond their social media posts. This was best illustrated in the following statements:

*"...they went a bit further by having a statement, but that doesn't mean my people are truly valued and our struggles are really understood."*

*"Seeing this would make me a little cautious whether they actually mean the statement or if they're just trying to put on a face. This would make me want to look more into the company to see if they truly embody what they say."*

Another statement combined these areas of concerns stating:

*"It's a nice statement and I appreciate the support, but I would like more information about specific ways this destination supports the Black community or commits to being inclusive or aware of our specific needs or worries. I have a somewhat better opinion of this destination than one that only posted the black square."*

These results suggested that adding text to the original call to action was appreciated more than simply posting the black square, however the textual component led to increased levels of scrutiny about the tourism office's overall business practices. Responses to the open-ended question suggested participants would have been more receptive to this form of advocacy if the statement included specific actions for improving or enhancing the Black community.

The advocacy statement represented by the visual alone evoked high levels of relational legitimacy. The inclusion of a Black family enabled participants to quickly connect with the post and the destination. As one participant stated, "... the tourist office has my concerns at heart." The following statement further expanded this idea:

*"This advocacy statement makes me feel heard and seen as a Black individual. Seeing people who are the same race as me makes me feel included as well..."*

The inclusion of the Black family spurred an immediate acknowledgment for whom this post is meant to connect. Seeing the family elicited emotional responses that connected to attributes of relational legitimacy (e.g., feeling seen and recognized). The inclusion of race in this advocacy statement implies that the racial representation does matter (Tucker et al., 2023).

Responses to the visual with the written statement also revealed high levels of relational legitimacy. This statement received less scrutiny than the others and included hints toward positive behavioral intentions. For example, one participant stated:

*"The combination of the photo and the passage lets me know that this tourism office REALLY appreciates Black people and they would have all of my support because of it."*

The image allowed participants to connect this form of advocacy due to the racial representation of the family. Additionally, the visual and statement received less scrutiny and was more positively viewed than the black square with the same written statement.

### Relational Legitimacy of Racial Justice Advocacy Statements and Behavioral Intentions

*H5. The perceived relational legitimacy of DMO's racial justice advocacy statements will influence Black travelers' behavioral intentions such that the visual with the written statement will be stronger than the black square, the black square with text, and the visual alone.*

ANOVA was conducted suggesting a strong statistical significance between relational legitimacy and behavioral intentions,  $F(3, 776) = 32.73, p < .001$ . Given the significance levels, the EMMeans were calculated for behavioral intentions. The EMMeans results are as follows: the black square is 4.40, 95% [CI] [4.00, 4.40]; the black square with written statement is 5.19, 95% [CI] [4.99, 5.39]; the visual statement is 5.32, 95% [CI] [5.12, 5.53]; and the visual with the written statement is 5.51, 95% CI [5.31, 5.72]. Tukey's post hoc method indicated significant differences in the behavior associated with the black square compared to all other forms of advocacy ( $p < .001$ ). Surprisingly, there was no statistical difference in behavior associated with the black square with written text as compared to the visual alone ( $p = .79$ ). The lack of statistical difference suggests that the language used in the sample statement and visual representation of a Black family results in comparable levels of affirmation. Lastly, the comparison between the black square with written text and the visual with written text ( $p = .11$ ) as well as the visual alone compared to the visual with written statement ( $p = .56$ ) showed no significant differences (Table 3). The lack of statistical significance indicates that hypothesis 5 is not supported as the visual with written statement did not have a stronger influence. The results instead indicated that the black square alone was weaker than any of the other statements.

The open-ended responses are once again used to illustrate qualitative differences between relational legitimacy and behavioral intentions and further explored the potential explanation for the lack of support for this hypothesis. It was evident that the black square was less likely than the other three forms of racial justice advocacy to lead to positive behavioral intentions. For example, one participant did not connect to the advocacy efforts and indicated a lack of desire to visit: "I would not go to this destination because all it is a black square. What is this supposed to mean?" Another participant stated:

**Table 3.** Pairwise Comparison t-Test ( $p$ -Values): Influence of Relational Legitimacy of DMO Racial Justice Advocacy Statements on Black Travelers' Behavioral Intentions.

Variable	Black square	Black square w/ written statement	Visual alone
Black square w/ written statement	0.001		
Visual alone	0.001	0.79	
Visual w/ written statement	0.001	0.11	0.56

$p < .001$ .

*"I would need to know more about the destination to make a decision. Again, the gesture is appreciated, but I need more information to see if I would be comfortable visiting this destination."*

Although the findings indicate a lack of statistical significance among the remaining statements, the open-ended statements present an alternative narrative, which suggest the black square with text also differs from the black square as well as the visual alone and the visual with text. For example, the black square with the text included comments that indicate mixed emotions regarding behavior:

*"It takes into account my identity and their advocacy for those who fall under my identity. I have a very positive view of this particular destination with an advocacy statement like this."*

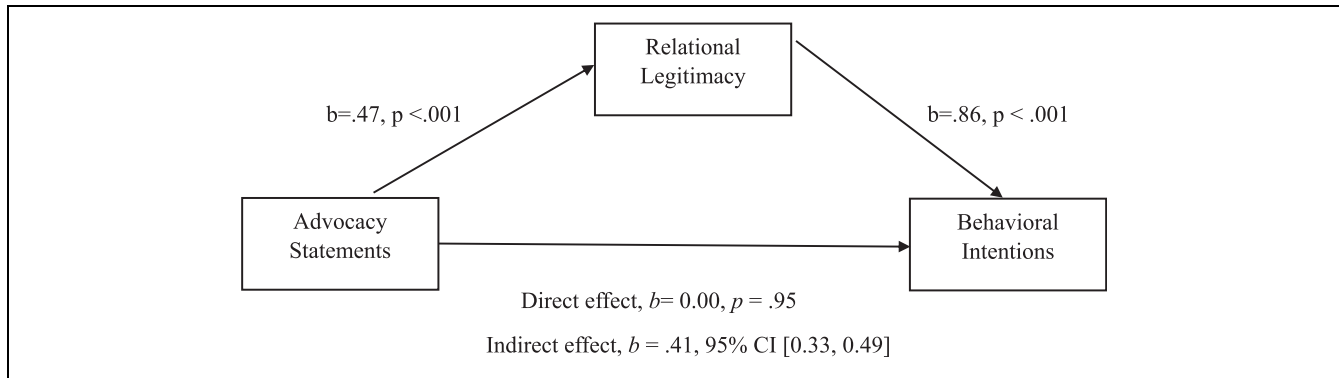
*"In this case, such an advocacy statement would likely not sway my opinion of the destination because it lacks substance. Actions and genuine efforts to combat racism and support the Black community are far more impactful than mere words."*

The above statements indicate that Black travelers have favorable opinions of DMO participation, but some may not be motivated to travel to the destination due to participation in advocacy alone. Instead, there is a desire to learn more about a destination's efforts to fight racism before making a travel decision.

In contrast, comments for the visual alone and the visual with the written statement offer support for the statistical findings and include more favorable comments about potential visitation. For example, one participation stated "I'd feel safe and would immediately want to spend money with this destination. They'd have my business." While another commented:

*"This advocacy statement makes me feel heard and seen as a Black individual. Seeing people who are the same race as me makes me feel included as well. I like how diverse they are and it makes me feel inclined to rely on them when choosing my destination."*

Such statements suggest that the visual alone and the visual with the text are effective in their ability to affirm



**Figure 4.** Model of advocacy statements as a predictor of behavioral intentions, mediated by relational legitimacy.

an individual's racial identity thereby eliciting positive behavioral intentions. Additionally, both advocacy statements resulted in sentiments associated with feeling safe, included, comfortable and welcomed. Clearly these two statements resonated with Black travelers.

**H6.** *Perceived relational legitimacy will mediate the relationship between racial justice advocacy statements and Black travelers' behavioral intentions.*

A mediation analysis was conducted to explore the association between the various racial justice advocacy statements, relational legitimacy, and behavioral intentions. Following the steps of Baron and Kenny (1986), the direct effect was calculated first. The direct effect of advocacy statements on the outcome ( $c'$ ) was not statistically significant (Estimate = 0.00,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $t = 0.06$ ,  $p = .953$ ), however, the direct effect of relational legitimacy was highly significant (Estimate = 0.86,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 43.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The overall model fit demonstrated a strong association between the three variables. The  $R^2$  value indicated that the model explains 74% of the variance of behavioral intentions. The second step investigated the effect of advocacy statements on relational legitimacy (path a). The results were significant with an estimated coefficient of 0.47 ( $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 10.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Next path b examined the effect of relational legitimacy on behavioral intentions. The analysis of relational legitimacy on behavioral intentions was estimated to be 0.86 ( $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 43.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results indicate there is a highly significant positive influence of relational legitimacy on behavioral intentions, therefore strongly supporting this hypothesis. Lastly, there is a significant indirect effect of relational legitimacy on behavioral intentions through advocacy statements,  $b = 0.41$ , 95% [CI] [0.33, 0.49] (see Figure 4).

These data suggest that relational legitimacy serves as a critical mediator influencing the relationship between racial justice advocacy statements and behavioral

intentions. When Black travelers feel as though their race is recognized and represented in a way that validates and supports their experience(s), certain behaviors such as recommending a destination, making positive comments, speaking highly, and planning to visit are more likely to occur. Statements like the ones below illustrate the mediating effect of relational legitimacy:

*"It would make me want to visit this destination even more. They are taking into account my identity and their support for those who are also of my identity. I would absolutely look to visit this destination."*

*"I would definitely visit the destination. The statement represents what I believe in and represents me."*

The quotes emphasize the role of relational legitimacy in increasing levels of trustworthiness among Black travelers which leads to positive perceptions and helps to foster a genuine interest in the destination. They further illustrate how relational legitimacy can be a bridge between DMOs' engagement in racial justice advocacy and real-life experience, thereby making it an influential part of the tourism decision-making process.

It should be noted that the variable personal attitude toward social advocacy, captured in the responses to whether participants felt organizations in general and tourism offices specifically should participate in social advocacy, had the potential to be confounding for hypotheses four through six. Regression analysis using R revealed no significant impact on relational legitimacy. Due to a lack of impact on the model, this variable was excluded to preserve parsimony.

These results provide insights into how individuals perceive and respond to racial-justice advocacy statements which offer empirical evidence of the legitimacy judgment process, particularly judgment formation and judgment reassessment (Tost, 2011). Findings from this study indicate Black travelers believe that the use of social advocacy statements are an appropriate form of engagement because they raise awareness about a specific topic. The

reassessment stage is a crucial aspect of the legitimacy process, as individuals critically evaluate their initial judgments considering the various components represented in each racial-justice advocacy statement. As shown in the findings these critiques were based on perceived inconsistencies and unknowns between the actions of DMOs and the images and text used in their statement. Connecting the findings from this study to the legitimacy judgment process demonstrates the dynamic nature of human evaluations which underscores the importance of thoughtful and multi-faceted initiatives and policies aimed at fostering meaningful progress toward racial justice.

## Conclusions

This study is the first of its kind to use legitimacy theory to examine the role of DMOs' use of racial justice advocacy statements on behavioral intentions of Black travelers. This new area of study indicates exciting opportunities to understand how DMOs social media can be used as a platform to support social causes that can affirm the identities of the targeted group. By focusing on relational legitimacy as a key component of individual judgments, this study uncovers the identity-based lens through which Black travelers view racial justice advocacy statements. This work bridges the gap between theory and practice by increasing our knowledge of how DMOs can best advocate in a digital context.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the discourse surrounding legitimacy theory, with a specific focus on the mediating role of relational legitimacy. Previous investigations into relational legitimacy have predominantly occurred within the framework of authority relationships in school, work, and political settings (Tost, 2011; Tyler, 1997). However, this research presents a novel perspective by extending its purview to encompass social identity and legitimacy dynamics of the organization-consumer relationship as represented by DMOs and Black travelers (Tost, 2011; Tucker et al., 2023). Through the stages of judgment formation, use, and reassessment, Black travelers reveal the complexities associated with this topic. While initial positive judgments may stem from a perceived alignment with the organization and its actions, it is important to recognize that subsequent reassessment can occur in response to inconsistencies between these digital statements and actual DMO actions.

This line of inquiry broadens legitimacy theory by incorporating the perspective of marginalized groups of people who are often overlooked but are crucial for maintaining an organization's legitimacy. This study specifically supports relational legitimacy as a key part of legitimacy theory in that failure to connect with the target audience can lead to organizational scrutiny, as

exemplified in the different perceptions of advocacy statements. It highlights the interplay between organizational practices, consumer identity, and legitimacy judgments, shedding light on ways in which organizations can foster a sense of inclusion and validation among diverse groups. These theoretical advancements are quite useful in laying the groundwork for practical implications for racial justice advocacy.

In terms of practical implications, the current study moves beyond descriptions of advocacy characteristics to understanding how and why certain types of advocacy statements resonate (or do not) with Black travelers. Posting on social media may give the appearance of social consciousness, but without actionable steps or previous engagement with the cause, such actions may be deemed performative. The Black travelers in this study desired a well-rounded approach that moves beyond reactionary normative concepts of justice (e.g., stating that racism/discrimination is bad). They wanted to know that an organization combines a myriad of strategies in addition to their social media posts (Sobande, 2024). For example, before posting, organizations should consider the issue, the call to action, and their association with the topic and/or relationship to the targeted group. Engagement in racial justice advocacy requires both representations associated with the target audience and statements affirming their stance. These collective recommendations echo and support the earlier research on advocacy statements in non-tourism contexts, including Wertley and Baker (2022), K. Park and Jiang (2023), Brenstad and Sølsnes (2019), and Heffron (2019), all outlined within the literature review.

The process of racial justice advocacy should begin long before the occurrence of social unrest. First, based on the tenants of relational legitimacy, Black consumers want to be recognized, valued, and seen (Tucker et al., 2023). Organizations can demonstrate their awareness of the needs and desires of communities of color by diversifying promotional materials, partnering with minority owned businesses, or engaging in events sponsored by diverse groups. Black travelers want to feel appreciated and important (Tucker et al., 2023). DMOs can demonstrate how and in what ways they are engaged in racial justice work by acknowledging contributions (past and present) of communities of color within their destinations. They can showcase their long-term advocacy initiatives that aid in advancing equity in the industry. This may include developing a group committed to advancing racial justice in tourism, presenting progress reports based on key performance indicators (KPIs), and offering regular opportunities for community feedback. Incorporating this work into the strategic plans of a destination ensures that engagement in racial justice is not a one-time occurrence.

As noted earlier, unfortunate situations related to social issues in current events continue to expand

engagement opportunities for DMOs. For example, recent increases in anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-LGBTQ + activities might indicate value for this type of initiative aimed at these tourist groups. Thus, this approach can also be used as a roadmap to enhance planning and policy initiatives specific to their destination.

### Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable contributions to the research on relational legitimacy and racial justice advocacy, there are limitations. First, the sample consisted solely of a U.S. population. Based on the specific events taking place in the U.S. coupled with the historical challenges associated with Black American travel, the authors felt it was imperative to gauge the opinions of a U.S. population. We also believe that Black Americans are sorely under-studied, and as such deserve exclusive attention; future studies may want to engage in comparative work. Additionally, we do recognize that in popular press and social media, similar sentiments of anti-Blackness were quickly visible in destinations around the globe as individuals began speaking out about injustices in their own countries. Thus, future research may seek to expand to global settings to gain a fuller understanding of relational legitimacy within the global Black travel market.

Second, while the DMO used in this study was intentionally fictitious (after considerable consideration) to limit destination bias, this approach may lack external validity. Future studies may wish to partner with specific DMOs to examine the role of race in specific geographical locations (Carter, 2008). This would be particularly enlightening for destinations with less racial diversity, as narratives from Black travelers would further explore how racial justice advocacy can be approached in a manner that resonates with them.

Third, utilizing an online survey platform such as Prolific may be viewed with suspicion by members of marginalized groups who have been exploited in the past. Arguably any type of academic research may be viewed with distrust, but future research using indigenous, feminist, and/or co-research approaches may reduce suspicion and yes, increase legitimacy of the research.

Fourth, the within-subjects design ensured all participants engaged with each statement. While the randomizer feature was used to vary the order in which participants viewed the statements, the system did not allow us to see the order each participant viewed the statements which would be useful for understanding further distinctions used to compare each statement. Future studies should consider platforms that include this option.

Lastly, the results suggest that visual and textual statements together increase relational legitimacy. However, only one image representing Black individuals was included in this study, a heterosexual young family. It

would be beneficial to examine how different types of visual images influence relational legitimacy and behavioral intentions. Based on the participants' open-ended responses, perhaps future theoretical exploration into distinctions among belonging, welcomeness, and comfort are warranted. Finally, this study focused on the relational dimension of legitimacy. However, as Tucker et al. (2023) indicate, Black travelers also engage with the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions to evaluate legitimacy. Future studies may consider including survey questions that speak to these dimensions. These additions would add to our understanding of the tourism industry as a taken-for-granted entity.

In conclusion, matters of relational legitimacy and social advocacy are complex and require nuanced, thoughtful processes and responses that are specific and relevant to the given situation. Participation in social advocacy is likely to be viewed favorably, particularly if it is a cause with which consumers relate. However, today's consumers are not easily swayed by statements alone, thus organizations must do the work on the front end to ensure travel and tourism truly operates as an accepted institution in communities around the world.


### Declaration of Conflicting Interests


The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iDs

Charis Tucker  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2318-241X>

Nancy G. McGehee  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0636-1992>

### References

- Afshardoost, M., & Eshaghi, M. S. (2020). Destination image and tourist behavioural intentions: A meta-analysis. *Tourism Management, 81*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104154>
- Alderman, D. H., Williams, K., & Bottone, E. (2022). Jim Crow journey stories: African American driving as emotional labor. *Tourism Geographies, 24*(2-3), 198–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1630671> [AQ: 5]
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(6), 1173–1182. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173>
- Bastrygina, T., Lim, W. M., Jopp, R., & Weissmann, M. A. (2024). Unraveling the power of social media influencers:

- Qualitative insights into the role of Instagram influencers in the hospitality and tourism industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 58, 214–243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2024.01.007>
- Bay, M. (2021). *Traveling black: A story of race and resistance*. Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, S., Dillette, A., & Robinson, E. (2024). Black travel is not a monolith. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(1), 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2022.2149848>
- Brenstad, I. M. S., & Søltnes, M. V. (2019). *Does corporate activism affect brand equity? An event study on 55 American brands* [Unpublished master's thesis, Handelshøyskolen BI]. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2622499>
- Bui, V., Alaei, A. R., Vu, H. Q., Li, G., & Law, R. (2022). Revisiting tourism destination image: A holistic measurement framework using big data. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(6), 1287–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875211024749>
- Carter, P. L. (2008). Coloured places and pigmented holidays: Racialized leisure travel. *Tourism Geographies*, 10(3), 265–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616680802236287>
- Chatterji, A. K., & Toffel, M. W. (2019). Assessing the impact of CEO activism. *Organization & Environment*, 32(2), 159–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026619848144>
- Chen, X., He, Y., Wang, L., & Xiong, J. (2021). The effects of customer socialization on customer behavior in social enterprises: Role of organizational legitimacy in the eyes of customers. *Management Decision*, 59(11), 2713–2736. <https://doi.org/10.1108/md-05-2019-0679>
- Chen, Y., Sherren, K., Smit, M., & Lee, K. Y. (2023). Using social media images as data in social science research. *New Media & Society*, 25(4), 849–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211038761>
- Chung, J. Y., Berger, B. K., & DeCoster, J. (2016). Developing measurement scales of organizational and issue legitimacy: A case of direct-to-consumer advertising in the pharmaceutical industry. *Journal of Business Ethics: JBE*, 137(2), 405–413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2498-8>
- Davis, J. F. (2018). Selling whiteness?—A critical review of the literature on marketing and racism. *Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)*, 34(1-2), 134–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2017.1395902>
- Dawkins, C. E. (2024). Shared inequity: An alternative frame for racial justice in employment. *Journal of Business Ethics: JBE*, 193(4), 825–838. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05725-9>
- Deephouse, D. L., Bundy, J., Tost, L. P., & Suchman, M. C. (2017). Organizational legitimacy: Six key questions. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. B. Lawrence, & R. E. Meyer (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 27–54). Sage Publications Ltd.
- DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (Vol. 26). Sage.
- Dillette, A., & Benjamin, S. (2022). The black travel movement: A catalyst for social change. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(3), 463–476. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287521993549>
- Dillette, A., Benjamin, S., & Alderman, D. (2024). Traveling to escape, resist, and belong: centering black experiences within tourism scholarship. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2305869>
- Dillette, A. K., Benjamin, S., & Carpenter, C. (2019). Tweeting the black travel experience: Social media counternarrative stories as innovative insight on #travelingwhileblack. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(8), 1357–1372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287518802087>
- Dodd, M. (2018). Globalization, pluralization, and erosion: The impact of shifting societal expectations for advocacy and public good. *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, 2(2), 221–238. <https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v2.i2.p221>
- Dodd, M. D., & Supa, D. (2015). Testing the viability of corporate social advocacy as a predictor of purchase intention. *Communication Research Reports*, 32(4), 287–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2015.1089853>
- Dolnicar, S., Coltman, T., & Sharma, R. (2015). Do satisfied tourists really intend to come back? Three concerns with empirical studies of the link between satisfaction and behavioral intention. *Journal of Travel Research*, 54(2), 152–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513513167>
- Drori, I., & Honig, B. (2013). A process model of internal and external legitimacy. *Organization Studies*, 34(3), 345–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612467153>
- Dudley, K. D., Duffy, L. N., Terry, W. C., & Norman, W. C. (2022). The historical structuring of the US tourism workforce: A critical review. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 30(12), 2823–2838. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1952417>
- Ellerup Nielsen, A., & Thomsen, C. (2018). Reviewing corporate social responsibility communication: A legitimacy perspective. *Corporate Communications an International Journal*, 23(4), 492–511. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-04-2018-0042>
- Farmaki, A. (2022). Corporate wokeness: An expanding scope of csr? *Tourism Management*, 93, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104623>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G\*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39(2), 175–191. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193146>
- Gretzel, U. (2017). Social media activism in tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 15(2), 1–14.
- Hadler, P. (2023). The effects of open-ended probes on closed survey questions in web surveys. *Sociological Methods & Research*. 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241231176846> [AQ: 6]
- Heffron, E. (2019). *Nike's corporate social advocacy (CSA) practices as related to strategic issues management (SIM) and threats to organizational legitimacy* [Master's thesis, University of Central Florida]. UCF Campus Repository. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/6502>
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). Diversity in tourism: A perspective article. *Tourism Review*, 75(1), 29–32. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-06-2019-0226>
- Huy, Q. N., Corley, K. G., & Kraatz, M. S. (2014). From support to mutiny: Shifting legitimacy judgments and emotional reactions impacting the implementation of radical change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(6), 1650–1680. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.0074>
- Im, J., Chung, Y. K., & Qin, D. (. (2023). Exploring diversity, equity, and inclusion in hospitality and tourism firms through

- the organizational justice and stakeholder theories. *Tourism Management*, 95, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104662>
- Korschun, D., Rafieian, H., Aggarwal, A., & Swain, S. D. (2019). *Taking a stand: Consumer response when companies get (or don't get) political*. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2806476>
- Lee, M., Hong, J. H., Chung, S., & Back, K.-J. (2021). Exploring the roles of DMO'S social media efforts and information richness on customer engagement: Empirical analysis on Facebook event pages. *Journal of Travel Research*, 60(3), 670–686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287520934874>
- Lewis, M. (2022, June 13). *Diversity in travel scorecard 2022*. Marty Sandiego. <https://www.martysandiego.com/post/diversity-in-travel-scorecard-2022>
- Li, H., Li, M., Lin, G., & Qiu, H. (2023). Perceiving destination through animated GIFs: A mixed method design for multifaceted image assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 62(1), 154–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875211057606>
- Li, J. Y., Kim, J. K., & Alharbi, K. (2022). Exploring the role of issue involvement and brand attachment in shaping consumer response toward corporate social advocacy (CSA) initiatives: The case of Nike's Colin Kaepernick campaign. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(2), 233–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1857111> [AQ: 7][AQ: 8]
- Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2020). Is a picture worth a thousand words? An empirical study of image content and social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113>
- Ma, X., & Fan, X. (2022). A review of the studies on social media images from the perspective of information interaction. *Information Management*, 6(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dim.2022.100004>
- Meade, A. W., & Craig, S. B. (2012). Identifying careless responses in survey data. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 437–455. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028085>
- Palmer, A., Koenig-Lewis, N., & Jones, L. E. M. (2013). The effects of residents' social identity and involvement on their advocacy of incoming tourism. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 38(Suppl 2), 142–151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.02.019>
- Park, K., & Jiang, H. (2023). Signaling, verification, and identification: The way corporate social advocacy generates brand loyalty on social media. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 60(2), 439–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420907121>
- Park, S., Mahlobo, C. T., & Oliver Peets, J. (2022). Flourishing through traveling while black: Unfiltered voices of Black travelers. *Tourism Management*, 91, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104514>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63(1), 539–569. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452>
- Pop, R.-A., Săplăcan, Z., Dabija, D.-C., & Alt, M.-A. (2022). The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions: the role of trust in consumer decision journey. *Electronic Commerce Research*, 25(5), 823–843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1895729>
- Qualtrics. (2024). *Randomizer*. Qualtrics. <https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/survey-module/survey-flow/standard-elements/randomizer/>
- Randrianasolo, A. A., & Arnold, M. J. (2020). Consumer legitimacy: Conceptualization and measurement scales. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 37(4), 385–397. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcm-03-2019-3124>
- Sobande, F. (2024). *Big brands are watching you: Marketing social justice and digital culture*. University of California Press.
- Sorin, G. (2020). *Driving while Black: African American travel and the road to civil rights*. Liveright Publishing.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relation* (pp. 7–24). Hall Publishers.
- Tost, L. P. (2011). An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *The Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 686–710. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0227>
- Treviño, L. K., Den Nieuwenboer, N. A., Kreiner, G. E., & Bishop, D. G. (2014). Legitimizing the legitimate: A grounded theory study of legitimacy work among ethics and Compliance Officers. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 123(2), 186–205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2013.10.009>
- Tucker, C. N., Gard McGehee, N., Xiang, Z., & Bradford, B. (2023). Representation matters: Measuring Black travelers' legitimacy judgments of DMOs. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231215079> [AQ: 9]
- Tyler, T. R. (1997). The psychology of legitimacy: A relational perspective on voluntary deference to authorities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review: An Official Journal of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc*, 1(4), 323–345. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0104\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0104_4)
- Tyler, T. R., & Lind, E. A. (1992). A relational model of authority in groups. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 115–191). Academic Press.
- Vaara, E., Aranda, A. M., & Etchanchu, H. (2024). Discursive legitimation: An integrative theoretical framework and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 50(6), 2343–2373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063241230511>
- Viglia, G., & Dolnicar, S. (2020). A review of experiments in tourism and hospitality. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 80, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102858>
- Wang, X., Mou, N., Zhu, S., Yang, T., Zhang, X., & Zhang, Y. (2024). How to perceive tourism destination image? A visual content analysis based on inbound tourists' photos. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 33, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100923>
- Wellman, M. L. (2022). Black squares for Black lives? Performative allyship as credibility maintenance for social media influencers on Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, 8(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221080473>

- Wertley, C. M., & Baker, S. J. (2022). Organizational advocacy for racial justice: A thematic content analysis of corporate twitter statements. *The Journal of Public Interest Communications*, 6(1), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v6.i1.p26>
- Yim, M. C. (2021). Fake, faulty, and authentic stand-taking: What determines the legitimacy of corporate social advocacy? *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 15(1), 60–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2020.1856853>
- Zhang, K., Chen, D., & Li, C. (2020). How are tourists different?—Reading geo-tagged photos through a deep learning model. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 21(2), 234–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1528008x.2019.1653243>

**Author Biographies** [AQ: 4]